

FILIPINO DEMOCRACY AND THE AMERICAN LEGACY



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ABSTRACT: The American legacy in the Philippines rests upon an indigenous Filipino culture—a humane social tradition with a respect for powerful leadership—and the influence of authoritarian Spanish rule for over 300 years that nevertheless introduced the values of Christianity. Led by Emilio Aguinaldo, the Philippine Revolution liberated the Philippines from the Spanish in 1898, with the assistance of the United States, but the U.S. annexed the islands, determined to make of it a democracy in the American image. Promises were made and kept to withdraw in 1946. Over the years, several political and administrative changes were made that came close to meeting initial objectives. Economically, however, the poor remained poor, and wealthy elites dominated the country. The Japanese occupation was a severe blow to democratic trends. After the war, Filipinos also found themselves isolated from the rest of Asia, in part because of their dependence on the United States. Martial law, introduced by Ferdinand Marcos in 1972 as a form of “constitutional authoritarianism,” lays stress on internal order, economic growth, national security, and better relations with Asian and socialist states. At the moment, many democratic practices of the past are suspended, although the concentrated power of Marcos is moderated by the values of Christianity, liberal democracy, and Filipino tradition, most of which were encouraged during the American period.

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IN HER role as an imperial power in the Pacific at the turn of the century, America decided to make of the Philippine Islands—her only colony—"a democratic republic in the American image."¹ Impelled clearly by military, economic, and world-power desires in this colonial adventure, the other side of America's ambivalent nature caused her to embark on a political, educational, social, and economic transformation in collaboration with the Filipinos. This experiment in democratization had its profound impact on the character of life and institutions on the islands, but understandably it produced mixed results uniquely Filipino. These outcomes reflected the contradictions of American colonial policy and, more importantly, the various responses of the Filipinos whose indigenous culture, social system, and way of life survived and transformed implanted American ideas and institutions.

THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY

In evaluating the development and practice of Filipino democracy since its beginnings about a century ago, we need a working definition of democracy that transcends variations of time, place, and specific institutions. Stripped to its essence, democracy has been defined as "that system of community government in which, by and large, the members of a community participate, directly or indirectly, in the making of decisions which affect them all."² In its ideal form, it is

one in which the citizen takes part in government not merely in helping

choose [between competitors for office], but by doing what is reasonably within his power to identify issues, formulate proposals, weigh evidence and argument on all sides, express convictions and explain their grounds, help to nominate party candidates—and in general to foster and to strengthen deliberation.

In Abraham Lincoln's felicitous and memorable phrase, democracy is "government of the people, by the people, and for the people," indicating not only popular participation in governmental affairs, but also on whose account and for whose benefit and welfare government exists.

This participatory concept of democracy³ has three dimensions which can be used to measure the degree of democracy being practiced at any given time. One is the quantitative breadth of democracy as "determined by the proportion of those in the community affected by a decision who do or may participate in the making of it."⁴ Another is the qualitative depth of democracy as "determined by the fullness, the character of the participation that does take place."⁵ A third is the range of democracy as determined by "the kinds of questions upon which the voice of the people rules, and the restrictions upon the authority of that voice, if any. . . ."⁶

Our concept of democracy also avers that democracy has its presuppositions, conditions, and instruments, all of which bear upon, but should not be confused with, the substance of democracy which is the people's participation in making decisions that affect all.⁷ Democracy presupposes the existence of a community within which it may be

1. George E. Taylor, *The Philippines and the United States: Problem of Partnership* (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 71.

2. Carl Cohen, *Democracy* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), p. 7.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 8–27.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 41–202.

operative and the rationality of the people in that community. The degree of success of Filipino democracy, like any other, depends upon conditions which may support or restrict each other, namely: (1) material, (2) constitutional (political freedoms and liberties), (3) intellectual, (4) psychological, and (5) protective (against external and internal threats). Finally, democracy has two crucial instruments of decision making whose institutional manifestations may vary: representation and majority rule.

SPANISH RULE, THE PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION AND DEMOCRACY

When the Spaniards came in the sixteenth century, there was no nation or national community. Lacking this first presupposition of democracy, early Filipinos lived in scattered *barangays* or communities of 30 to 100 households, based largely on kinship. These were led originally by hereditary *datos* and subsequently by chieftains who were chosen for their ability and prowess. The chieftains exercised all powers of government. Traditions, usages, and orders were strictly enforced by the nobility upon the other members of these feudal-like communities which consisted of the *maharlikas* (warrior-class of freemen), the *aliping mamamahay* (commoners or householders who served a lord), and the *aliping saguiguilir* (slaves who served their lord in his house and farm and who could be sold). While two or more *barangays* might be joined by kinship or friendship for mutual protection, feuding chieftains settled their differences by trial of battle or ordeal. In peace, they kept "a rough and ready sort of justice

within their communities."⁸ The chief as judge was assisted by a council of elders as jury in administering justice. Social class made a difference in the sanctions imposed.

In the absence of unity among early Filipinos, the military superiority and political organization of the Spaniards enabled them to subjugate and colonize the former. The Spaniards assimilated the *barangays*, except those in the Muslim south, by the appointment of the former chieftains as *cabezas de barangay* and *gobernadorcillos*, the only positions open to the Filipinos. These petty local bureaucrats functioned as middlemen, representing the will of the colonizers, enforcing their power and authority among the Filipinos, and protecting the colonizers from the anger of the townspeople: "there was no real participation nor representation even in the municipal governments."⁹ The people did not elect the *gobernadorcillos*. Real power in the localities was exercised by the Spanish parish priest or friar.

During more than 300 years of colonial rule, the Spaniards unwittingly laid some of the bases for the Filipino and American experiment in democratization. The far-flung islands and *barangays* became a national entity under a centralized and theocratic Spanish colonial administration. Roman Catholicism gave the Filipinos a common bond of Christian and humane beliefs, as did their emergent nationalism

8. Horacio de la Costa, *Readings in Philippine History: Selected Historical Texts Presented with a Commentary* (Manila: Bookmark, n.d.), pp. 3-6.

9. Teodoro A. Agoncillo and Milagras C. Guerrero, *History of the Filipino People*, 4th ed. (Quezon City: R. P. Garcia, 1973), p. 87.

expressed in cumulative grievances and numerous revolts against Spanish abuses, racial discrimination, and despotism. The exploitative, iniquitous, and oppressive law-and-order colonial government in the islands, in contrast to the political systems that educated Filipinos (*ilustrados*) read about or observed in Spain and in other European countries and in America, gave them alternative ideas of government. Improvements in agriculture, communication, and industry, and in the education of a new Filipino middle class, limited though these were, laid the foundations of a national economy and increased contact with the outside world with its liberal and revolutionary ideas.

Several *ilustrados* who organized the Reform Movement, notably Jose Rizal, Lopez Jaena, and Marcelo H. del Pilar, imbibed in Spain and propagated in the islands the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment which had provided the philosophical basis of the French and American revolutions: democracy, popular sovereignty, liberty, and good government.¹⁰ While also believing in the ultimate right to revolution, the *ilustrados* pressed for Filipino participation and other liberal reforms within the Spanish colonial system, until Andres Bonifacio, a common man, launched the Philippine Revolution in 1896.

In 1898, having liberated the countryside from Spanish rule and bottled up the Spanish forces in Manila's *Intramuros* with the aid of Admiral Dewey, the Filipino

revolutionaries, now led by Emilio Aguinaldo, believed that they had sovereignty over the islands in which a national political community finally had been formed. A degree of Filipino political participation in basic decisions affecting them was being achieved amid the exigencies of revolution and the increasing threat of colonization by yet another Western power represented by Admiral Dewey and steady reinforcements of American troops. Independence from Spain was proclaimed on June 12, 1898. A dictatorial, then revolutionary, and finally a republican government was established. Local elections were held in several provinces, although suffrage was restricted to the gentry. Revolutionary intellectuals prepared various constitutions leading to the so-called Malolos Constitution for the Philippine Republic. All these documents embodied the ideals of Western-style liberal democracy: independence, popular sovereignty, popular participation and representation, the political freedoms and governmental institutions designed for the practical realization of those ideals, and the uplift of the masses. The Filipino revolutionaries believed that they had crossed the threshold into an independent existence along democratic lines.

They did not reckon that "the Mighty and Humane North American Nation (Declaration of Philippine Independence from Spain)," whom they regarded as an ally in the war against Spain and the protector of Filipino sovereignty, soon would replace the overthrown Spaniards as the young nation's colonial master. In good faith or with naïveté, Aguinaldo and his fellow revolutionaries assumed that the world's

10. Cesar A. Majul, *The Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Philippine Revolution* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1957), pp. 19-198.

largest democracy, which was born in revolution and had just freed Cuba from Spain, had reached across the Pacific to help liberate the islands, and would not violate its own creed of freedom by forcing its rule upon a freedom-loving Asian people who had just thrown off the yoke of Spanish imperialism. Shortly before the Spanish-American War that brought the Americans to Cuba and the Philippines, President McKinley had said that "forcible annexation . . . cannot be thought of, [and] by our code . . . would be criminal aggression."¹¹ As Aguinaldo told General Anderson: "I have studied attentively the Constitution of the United States, and I find in it no authority for colonies, and I have no fear."¹² Much later he would reminisce: "We were in our own country upholding to the death the sound and sacred Jeffersonian principle that government should be with the consent of the governed."¹³

Betrayal and disillusionment, along with admiration and awe, thus were among the Filipinos' first impressions of the Americans. The human cost of the Philippine-American War (1899-1902), which the Americans belittled as an "insurrection," demonstrated the seriousness of both the Filipino defense of freedom and the American colonial design: the 30,000 or so Filipino troops sustained 16,000 casualties, and some 100,000 Filipinos died of famine and disease; the United States lost 4,234 dead and 2,818 wounded among the 126,468 officers

and men deployed, in addition to those of the navy.¹⁴ Both sides showed valor and brutality. Moreover, President McKinley did not bother to inquire into the conditions in the islands or the Filipinos' readiness for self-rule. In fact, he kept the American public uninformed about his intention to buy the islands from Spain and did not seek approval of Congress for his decision to colonize the Philippines until it was time for ratification of the Treaty of Paris. Based on hindsight, President McKinley's actions regarding the Philippines seemed to presage America's blundering into Vietnam some 60 years later.

DEMOCRATIC TUTELAGE UNDER AMERICAN COLONIAL RULE

If America succumbed to the lobbies of naval strategists, businessmen, Protestant missionaries, and the lure of great power politics in annexing the Philippines, American imperialism differed in "that almost from the beginning it was seen as a self-liquidating enterprise, an ambitious experiment in controlled and planned political growth."¹⁵ Despite the fortuitous convergence of the imperialist forces favoring annexation, the Treaty of Paris was ratified in the U.S. Senate by a majority of only one vote, and the Bacon Amendment which would have defined a transient American presence in the Philippines was defeated by the vice-president's deciding vote.

The terms of democratic tutelage of the Filipinos under American rule were prescribed in the Instructions to the Philippine Commission, the Philippine Bill of 1902, the

11. Taylor, *The Philippines and the United States*, p. 54.

12. James H. Blount, *American Occupation of the Philippines: 1898-1912* (Quezon City: Malaya Books Inc., 1968), pp. 58-9.

13. Emilio Aguinaldo and Vicente Albano Pacis, *A Second Look at America* (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, 1957), p. 100.

14. Taylor, *The Philippines and the United States*, p. 43.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Philippine Autonomy Act of 1916 (Jones Law), and the Philippine Independence Act (Tydings-McDuffie Law) of 1934. Altogether, these organic acts and their implementation established a pattern of progressive Filipinization and increasing political participation of Filipinos in all branches of government under a rule of law and political freedoms, a process of decolonization culminating in Philippine independence in 1946, after barely 50 years or two generations of democratic tutelage.

If the powers of government ultimately were to be vested in the hands of the governed, their education was essential to the wise direction of that government. Besides, the Americans believed almost with magical faith in public education as a ladder to social mobility and a means of inculcating the values, attitudes, and sentiments conducive to modernity and democratic behavior. Specifically, public school education sought to introduce the core values of democracy, along with honesty, industry, thrift, sportsmanship, and patriotism.¹⁶ For these reasons, American colonial policy established, maintained, and expanded a public school system from the primary level upward, and the University of the Philippines was founded in 1908. The positive response of the Filipinos matched the educational zeal of the Americans: school enrollment grew to 610,500 in 1910, to 943,500 in 1920, and to 1,204,500 in 1934. Literacy rose from the 5 to 8 percent in the Spanish period to 8 percent in 1903, to 49 percent in 1918, and to 65 percent in 1935.¹⁷ Filipino students were sent

to American universities, and upon their return they taught in the schools or worked in various government offices. Civil service examinations (based on recruitment by merit and achievement) became a means of access to public service. Democratic socialization also was being extended and reinforced by American Protestant and Jesuit missionaries, the YMCA, Rotary, Boy Scouts, and a host of other religious, civic service, and fraternal organizations. The English language and improved media fostered national unity, facilitated official and business communication, and popularized American life-styles among educated and urban Filipinos.

Under the American economic ideology of free enterprise, the agricultural export sector improved, and so did infrastructure, transportation, and communication. Foreign trade grew faster than domestic commerce over which Filipinos had only 25 percent control, against 50 percent by the Chinese, and 20 percent by the Japanese.¹⁸ Wages of skilled labor increased, a middle class of government personnel and schoolteachers and business employees expanded, and the position of women further improved. The national income increased five times over, but population also increased from 7.6 million in 1903 to 16 million in 1939. Standards of living rose for the middle and upper classes. Modern public health and welfare controlled epidemics, lowered mortality, improved sanitation, and relieved misfortune. However, prosperity based on free trade made the Philippine economy heavily dependent on the American market. The condition of the common man, who formed the mass base of society,

16. Lewis E. Gleeck, Jr., *American Institutions in the Philippines: 1898-1941* (Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1976), p. 29.

17. Agoncillo and Guerrero, *History of the Filipino People*, p. 424.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 426-28.

was barely alleviated vis-à-vis the wealthy classes who reaped the most from economic development and political participation.

Political participation during the Philippine Revolution and the first Philippine Republic was severely limited by time and circumstances. This republic and its parliamentary system were designed by conservative nationalists who dominated them as an "oligarchy of the intelligentsia," not the "oligarchy of ignorance" of the lower-class revolutionaries.¹⁹ Under American rule, Filipino democracy increased rapidly in breadth and range, although much less in depth. Compared to Spanish times, however, there was greater opportunity for upward mobility in the new social structure. From the outset, municipal and provincial officials were elected by the people. The first chief justice of the Supreme Court was a Filipino, and so were most judges in the lower courts. Filipinization of the civil bureaucracy was carried out with such speed that "in less than two decades the staffing and control of the administrative apparatus of the colony had been turned over to the subject people."²⁰ Filipinos shared in exercising legislative power in the early years. From 1907 only Filipinos were qualified to become members of the Philippine Assembly (until 1916), of the Philippine Legislature (1916-1935), of the National Assembly (1935-1940), and of the Congress of the Philippines to the end of American rule in 1946.

19. Bonifacio Salamanca, "The Philippine-U.S. Relationship: History," in *The Philippine American Relationship* (Manila: 6th Annual Student Leaders Seminar, U.S. Embassy, 1974), p. 47.

20. Onofre D. Corpuz, *The Bureaucracy in the Philippines* (Manila: University of the Philippines, Institute of Public Administration, 1957), p. 202.

Although the Philippines was under an American governor-general until 1935, from 1916 all members of his cabinet were Filipinos, except the secretary of public instruction who was also the vice governor-general. The Philippine Commonwealth established in 1935 was headed by a Filipino president and vice-president, both directly elected by the people. Although all laws enacted by the Filipino legislature were subject to the veto of the governor-general and ultimately to the authority of the U.S. Congress, in practice the Filipinos enjoyed substantial autonomy.

Political participation also expanded with the incorporation or cooptation into the political process of various interest groups in a modernizing and increasingly complex society: agricultural groups, such as sugar, coconut, and abaca planters; business groups, such as the Filipino, Chinese, and American chambers of commerce; professional groups, such as the Philippine Medical Association and the Philippine Bar Association, and associations of teachers, engineers, accountants, and scientists; and the various religious and voluntary bodies. On the fringes of politics were peasants and laborers who had formed the National Peasants Union and the Philippine Labor Congress and many smaller unions.

Public participation in politics and policy making was enhanced by an electorate that grew with the population, the removal of property qualifications, and women's suffrage. Political parties were formed, but these came to be dominated by the Nacionalista party led by Manuel L. Quezon and Sergio Osmeña, and these were essentially parties of politicians, not mass parties. Their members were mostly contestants for

elective positions belonging to the wealthy, landowning families descended from the *principalia*, *ilustrados*, and *caciques* of the Spanish era. Other so-called party members mostly were kinsmen and allies linked to politicians in a patron-client relationship. The paramount issue after 1907 was independence, and this issue came to be monopolized by the Nacionalista party. Since party politicians belonged to the nation's elite and privileged class, few issues of principle, policy, or interest divided them; their power rested on wealth, the size and loyalties of their personal following in their localities, as well as on their political skills.

Political freedom encouraged militant labor and peasant leaders into forming the Socialist party and the Communist party to mobilize the lower classes, especially the tenants in Central Luzon who had felt exploited since the Spanish period, and to agitate for reforms. The merger of these two parties of the left in 1938 made the peasants and workers of this region a sophisticated and potentially potent force. For various reasons, including the paternalistic patron-client relationship between the rich and the poor in most parts of the country, the revolutionary parties and unions did not have wide appeal, but the agrarian unrest which they inspired late in the American period set the scene for the full-scale rebellion of the Huks and Communists in the late '40s and early '50s.

Following the provisions of the Tydings-McDuffie Act, the Filipinos elected delegates to a convention that drafted a constitution approved by President Franklin Roosevelt, and ratified by the Filipinos in a plebiscite in May 1934. After the election of Manuel L. Quezon and

Sergio Osmeña as president and vice-president, respectively, of the commonwealth which was to be the country's transition government from colony to republic 10 years afterwards, their feuding factions coalesced. With an overwhelming party in power and no effective opposition, a virtual one-party system became entrenched under Quezon's towering leadership. In the wake of labor uprisings and agrarian unrest in Luzon and parts of the southern islands, Senator Juan Sumulong warned that the masses had "no voice nor vote as minorities in the formulation of government policies, because the majority and minority parties represented almost exclusively the intelligentsia and . . . the . . . plutocracy."²¹ Alarmed by rising discontent and inspired by Roosevelt's New Deal, Quezon initiated several progressive policies and programs aimed at social justice for poor and disadvantaged citizens.

On the eve of the commonwealth, in 1934, the last American governor-general, Frank Murphy, told the Philippine legislature: "Free education, constitutional principles, freedom of conscience and opinion, material progress, economic development, stable finances, responsible government—these essentials of a sound and enduring democracy have been established in the land."²²

Five years later, American High Commissioner Francis Sayre also claimed several "salutary and outstanding accomplishments," and then admitted:

neither a sizable independent middle class nor an influential public opinion has developed. . . . Maldistribution of property, of land, and of wealth in many

21. Agoncillo and Guerrero, *History of the Filipino People*, pp. 406, 416.

22. Gleec, *American Institutions*, p. 300.

forms continues. The gap between the mass population and the small governing class has broadened and social unrest has reached serious proportions.²³

The Americans lacked "a philosophy of radical improvement."²⁴ In the early years, American administrators emphasized education, public health, and public works, and de-emphasized politics, believing that economic stability was of primary importance for self-rule. It was believed, further, that only when the education of the masses was complete would they be able to challenge the entrenched elite.²⁵ However, "by ignoring the sensitive agrarian problems, the United States allowed the traditional elite to maintain its long established social and economic dominance."²⁶ American colonial officials were relatively more influential in national administration and exerted little influence at local levels. "The democratization of the Philippines was carried out more by the Filipino leaders, operating within their cultural values and their own conceptions of American democracy, than by the colonial 'supervisors,'"²⁷ Contrary to the expectations of some Americans, as Filipinization of politics and administration progressed, centralization also increased—upon the instigation of Filipino leaders.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 300–1.

24. Theodore W. Friend, *Between Two Empires: The Ordeal of the Philippines: 1929–1946* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 20.

25. Michael Cullinane, "Implementing the 'New Order': The Structure and Supervision of Local Government during the Taft Era," in *Compadre Colonialism: Philippine American Relations, 1898–1946* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, Michigan Papers on South and Southeast Asia, No. 3. Reprinted by Solidaridad Publishing House of Manila), p. 25.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

27. *Ibid.*

On the whole, how did the Philippine economy fare under American rule?

Overdependence on a few exports, tenantry, indebtedness, low productivity, corruption and inefficiency, undercapitalization, miserable working conditions—all symptoms of economic backwardness were present at the end of the American period as they had been at the beginning. Some of them had been mildly alleviated, others were much worse.²⁸

Industrialization was not promoted because of the assumption of the Americans and the Filipino elite that the exchange of Philippine raw materials for American manufactures was equitable. Some Filipino nationalists look back and accuse the Americans of exploiting and keeping the Philippines in agrarian dependency. But it may be that the American failure to transform the economy was simply "a failure to see beyond the Filipino elite definition of the society as static, irrevocably agrarian; a failure as much of politics as of economics; a failure born less of exploitation than of inertia."²⁹

While permitting considerable political participation, and while the bureaucracy, private business, and the press opened up channels of access for substantial numbers of persons from non-elite families, the introduction of American ideals and institutions by the Americans did not and probably could never have fundamentally altered either the indigenous power structure or the centralized political and administrative system. Once it had been decided that the Filipinos were to be trained for self-government and

28. Norman G. Owen, "Philippine Economic Development and American Policy: A Reappraisal," in *Compadre Colonialism*, p. 55.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

eventual independence, the Americans found it necessary and expedient to form a tacit alliance with the Filipino landowning elite and retain the oligarchical politics and centralized administration which were part of the Spanish legacy, and to leave largely untouched the semi-feudal conditions in the countryside. By and large "at the end of the American period, the average *tao* lived where his grandfather had lived, was deeper in debt, remained without land title, and grew his crops as inefficiently as anywhere in the world."³⁰ The poverty, ignorance, and dependency of most Filipinos, especially in the rural areas, had made them vulnerable to manipulation or neglect by the ruling elite. In their condition of subsistence and dependency, they could not influence policy.

The persistence of ancient familism, personalism, and parochialism³¹ failed to develop among Filipinos an idea of "social well-being or national welfare." Having been long a colonized people, their effective training in democratic citizenship so emphasized "the assertion of rights that they almost neglected to develop an idea of duty they as individuals owed to a society, nation and state."³² An evident lesson of Filipino democracy under American guidance and thereafter is that no one but the Filipinos themselves, if they really wanted, could develop a political and economic system that would enable the people at large to participate in, influence, and benefit from the processes of decision making affecting

them all. Democracy requires the freedom and the ability of its citizens to participate in ways that count. Nevertheless, the Filipinos had gained some experience in democratic self-rule that few other peoples in the underdeveloped world had enjoyed.

FILIPINO DEMOCRACY UNDER THE REPUBLIC (1946-1972)

When the Japanese invaded the Philippines in World War II, the Filipinos realized, to their chagrin, that they and their American guardians could not protect the country and its evolving democratic way of life from the aggressor. During three years of Japanese occupation, death, untold suffering, physical ruin, economic dislocation, and demoralization descended on the hapless Filipinos. On the other hand, Filipino resiliency, faith, and ingenuity enabled the nation to survive and finally, with the return of the American forces under General MacArthur, resume life in peace. In the most inauspicious of times, the Filipinos regained their independence with the end of American colonial rule on July 4, 1946. The war taught most Filipinos the difference between life under Japanese despotism and that under the Americans, and made them the more appreciative of the latter. At the same time, the Filipinos had to submit to infringements on their sovereignty when the U.S. Congress demanded the retention of military bases in the islands under onerous terms, and an amendment to the republic's constitution to allow parity rights to Americans in the exploitation of Philippine natural resources and the operation of public utilities in exchange for individual war damage payments in excess of \$500. Still dependent on the United States for her reconstruction, foreign

30. Ibid., p. 51.

31. Jose V. Abueva, "Continuity and Change in Filipino Political Styles," a paper presented at the 28th International Congress of Orientalists, Canberra, Australia, 6-11 January 1971, pp. 1-24.

32. Friend, *Between Two Empires*, p. 72.

trade, and national security, the Philippines had to toe the American line in foreign policy and delay building ties with fellow Asian countries.³³ The image of an American satellite in the Cold War era was part of the continuing American legacy of the Filipinos through the early 1970s.

American aid to the Philippines after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, and through the Korean and Indochina Wars, sought not only to help bolster regional security, but also to strengthen the national economy and establish political stability by helping improve education, foster trade unionism, institute agrarian reforms, and improve public management, as if to continue helping the Philippines in her and America's unfinished democratic experiment. In these efforts, as in colonial times, American private and philanthropic assistance played significant roles. To date, the Philippines voluntarily derives benefits from U.S. military and economic assistance as part of regional security arrangements and U.S. global strategy.

From 1946 to about 1968, the legitimacy, stability, and responsiveness of the Philippine political system appeared to have passed a series of tests. Except for the Communist-Huk rebellion, there was little serious challenge to the authority of the national government. Political and governmental processes operated within constitutional bounds, restrained by the press, civic organizations, and the Supreme Court. Twice the vice-president succeeded to office upon the death of the president. Voting turn-out averaged about

80 percent and was notably greater in rural areas. The two-party system made possible the alternation of major parties and the defeat of four incumbent presidents. The turnover of legislators and local officials suggested a highly competitive and responsive politics. The bureaucracy and the military were subordinate and responsible to the Congress and an increasingly powerful president. Although criticisms of the malfunctioning of Filipino democracy were common, various public opinion polls showed its general approval by the people.³⁴

Beneath these manifestations lurked other realities. The population increased from 19 million in 1949 to 37 million in 1970. Although GNP and per capita income increased steadily, the country remained underdeveloped and income and wealth became more concentrated. Poverty clearly worsened and no meaningful narrowing of the gap between rich and poor occurred.³⁵ Economic underdevelopment and rising income inequality increased pressures on politicians to provide jobs and economic security. The expansion of national government activities, the institution of import substitution policies, and economic nationalization made the government more centralized and powerful. At the same time, greater economic power was concentrated in fewer and fewer families.

The president correspondingly was becoming more powerful as

34. Jose V. Abueva, ed., *Filipino Politics: Nationalism and Emerging Ideologies* (Manila: Modern Book Company, 1972), pp. 14-15.

35. Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP), *Measuring the Quality of Life: Philippine Social Indicators* (1975), pp. 12-13.

33. Hernando J. Abaya, *The Untold Philippine Story* (Quezon City: Malaya Books Inc., 1967), pp. 13-180.

national political leader and patron. National and provincial political considerations dominated local ones. The autonomy of local leadership declined. With the shift in the balance of power from local elites to national elites, and especially the president, the traditional bargaining and exchange between them became more of a hierarchical relationship between subordinate and superior.³⁶

Political participation changed with the decay and displacement of traditional institutions, greater economic insecurity, and social injustice.³⁷ The Hukbalahap, the anti-Japanese army of the Peasants Labor Union during Japanese occupation, felt an injustice in the unseating of its leaders in Congress, in its harassment by the constabulary and the landlords' civilian guards, and in the tenancy of the peasants or their displacement by mechanization under absentee landlords. Except for short-lived compromises with the government, the Huks, which came under Communist leadership, engaged the armed forces in guerrilla warfare that threatened the capture of Manila and overthrow of the government until the government's campaign under Ramon Mag-saysay broke the back of Huk resistance in the early 1950s.³⁸ For all the sacrifice of the Huk rebellion, the agrarian problem was not being solved through the 1960s.

There were other changes in the political structure and styles of political participation that were

either subtle or open but non-violent. For one, national and local elections were becoming more expensive. In many places only well-to-do and landowning local elite families or candidates backed by national politicians could expect to win. The escalating cost of elections was due to the growing population, the commercialization of the local economy, the concentration of wealth in national elite families and politicians, the increasing number of economically insecure voters who were willing to sell their votes, and the increasing number of candidates who sought power, prestige, and economic advantage in elective posts and were willing to spend money in exchange for electoral support.

In some places the traditional patron-client basis of politics was breaking down. Personal loyalties were giving way to reliance on jobs, money, and projects.³⁹ Some landlord politicians turned to other pursuits, or simply contributed to the candidacy of their protégés. In others, new political leaders emerged from non-elite families and headed the local political machines linked upward to national parties and politicians.⁴⁰ Political parties were plagued by factionalism, by party switching, by rebels who contested the official party candidates, and by independent candidates, again indicating intense political competition and the inability of the party system to integrate all

36. David A. Rosenberg, "Conclusion: Premonitions of Martial Law," in Benedict J. Kerkvliet, ed., *Political Change in the Philippines: Studies of Local Politics Preceding Martial Law* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1974), pp. 243-58.

37. Kerkvliet, *ibid.*, pp. 10-257.

38. Jose V. Abueva, *Ramon Magsaysay: A Political Biography* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1971), pp. 157-75.

39. Lorcis Paul Benson, "Changing Political Alliance Patterns in the Rural Philippines: A Case Study from Camarines Norte," in Kerkvliet, *Political Change in the Philippines*, pp. 139-50.

40. K. G. Machado, "Changing Patterns of Leadership Recruitment and Emergence of the Professional Politicians in Philippine Local Politics," in Kerkvliet, *Political Change in the Philippines*, pp. 77-125.

the power seekers and diversifying interests of a modernizing country. In the light of these changes, and the advent of professionalized campaigning, party nominations, conventions and elections for presidential, vice-presidential, and senatorial candidates also were becoming the preserve of the substantially wealthy.

The consequences of the deterioration of traditional patron-client relations and the inability of the parties and machines to channel political action or provide economic security to broad groups of citizens are many and varied. The temptation toward excessive patronage, corruption, and exploitation of public office became irresistible. Government resorted to deficit financing and diversion of foreign exchange reserves, especially during election years. Not infrequently, severe competition brought out "gold, guns and goons" during campaigns, for some politicians had become veritable "warlords." Political cynicism became widespread and infected even the youth.⁴¹

The perceived corruption and ineffectiveness of government and politicians and their presumed subservience to American and other foreign interests, and the mounting nationalism of progressive intellectuals, labor, and peasant leaders, led to ideological diversity and confrontation politics in Metro Manila and its environs in the late 1960s.⁴² More left-of-center groups became active, among them the Christian Social Movement, the Movement for the Advancement of

Nationalism, and the Kabataang Makabayan. Student activism and strikes proliferated, and in 1970 students marching to Malacañang battled the police and the military and sustained casualties. In 1971 the bombing of the political rally of the Liberal party in Plaza Miranda threatened to annihilate the opposition, and gave President Marcos reason for suspending the writ of habeas corpus over the land. Moslem rebels in the south began agitating for secession, partly in protest against their traditional leaders who had ceased to provide for their security and welfare.

Meanwhile, most citizens in the provinces remained amorphous masses who were poorly integrated into the functioning of interest groups, parties, the Congress, and the bureaucracy. Unorganized and unable to see their individual problems and interests in terms of policy changes, they could neither assert the necessary policy demands on legislators or administrators, nor provide adequately the required public scrutiny and support needed by a well-functioning democracy. While Metro Manila and Central Luzon were seething with discontent, ideological ferment, and confrontations with political authorities, most provinces seemed as calm as ever, although the results of the senatorial elections in 1971 showed that the people wanted a change in political leadership. The 1971 Constitutional Convention was a timely response to the crescendo of demands for political reform.

The press, supposedly one of the most free in the world, was usually sensational and unbalanced in its coverage of events. Actually, some media and their practitioners were biased if not corrupted tools of politicians, while others that were

41. Loretta Makasiar Sicat, *The Political Attitudes of Young Filipinos: A Study in Political Socialization* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1972), pp. 79-88.

42. Abueva, *Filipino Politics*, pp. 54-267.

independent and honest tended to create a public sense of crisis by exaggerating or distorting the facts, or by habitually ignoring the positive. The unintended consequences of this unbalanced and irresponsible journalism were the aggravation of political cynicism; the undermining of representative institutions like Congress, the parties, elections, and the press itself; and the predisposing of the citizenry to an authoritarian alternative to participatory democracy.

THE EFFECTS OF MARTIAL LAW ON DEMOCRACY (1972-1976)

President Ferdinand Marcos imposed martial law on September 21, 1972, "to save the nation and institute reforms." A year later he revealed more fully the events that led him to this act that changed Filipino democracy, such as it was, into what he calls "constitutional authoritarianism." He was convinced that his enemies were plotting to eliminate him by coup d'état, assassination, or forced resignation. He cited "seven sources of threats to the republic: the communist revolutionaries, the rightists, the Muslim secessionists, the private armies and political warlords, the criminal elements, the oligarchs, and the foreign interventionists."⁴³

There were theories such as the following advanced by others to explain the president's action. He simply wanted to perpetuate himself in power for self-aggrandizement. He was influenced by American business interests and multinational corporations to opt for an authoritarian solution to mounting disorder and economic nationalism. Frustrated

by his growing inability to cope with simultaneous problems in spite of his powers, it was propitious to emulate his strongmen neighbors: Suharto of Indonesia, Lee of Singapore, Razak of Malaysia, Thanom of Thailand, Park of Korea.

Whatever the motives, the consequences of Marcos's imposition of martial law, with the critical support of the armed forces, were visible enough. He remains in power indeterminately. Under the 1935 constitution, he could not have succeeded himself after December 30, 1975. Under the 1973 constitution, he had to be elected by the interim national assembly as prime minister to retain his powers. He abolished the Congress and has not convened the interim national assembly. He commands executive, legislative, military, and administrative powers. The independence of the judiciary has been further weakened. Administration-sponsored citizen assemblies, referenda, and, lately, elections of some local councilors have replaced plebiscites and regular elections as modes of political participation. The media, some of which are owned by relatives of Mrs. Marcos and business friends of the president, all are supportive of the Marcos administration and the New Society it has sought to establish. Formerly elected local officials hold office at the pleasure of the president, and so do, in law, practically all government personnel. Martial law began with the arrest of many persons known to be opposed to the president or regarded by the administration as dangerous to the state, including legislators, convention delegates, local politicians, publishers and journalists, professors, student activists, and labor and peasant leaders. An undeter-

43. Ferdinand E. Marcos, *Notes on the New Society of the Philippines* (Manila: Marcos Foundation, Inc., 1973), pp. 11, 40.

mined number remained under detention in various camps for different periods, with or without charges brought against them, although many have been released or pardoned.

The 1971 constitution was overtaken by martial law and its product, the 1973 constitution, contains transitory provisions that enable the president to claim correctly that his rule is "constitutional authoritarianism" because it is based on those provisions. The Supreme Court resolved by a vote of six to four that the 1973 constitution was not properly ratified by the citizen assemblies which were hurriedly called by the president in January 1973, but the same tribunal found no further legal obstacle to the enforcement and effectiveness of that constitution. The constitution proper is liberal, socially oriented, progressive, nationalistic, and developmental.⁴⁴

Politically conscious citizens seem polarized between the members and supporters of the Marcos administration who share in the permitted modes of political participation and those who feel outside the political arena and reduced to political inefficacy or inconsequence. The former are overt in their advocacy and support of the new dispensation.⁴⁵ The latter are either resigned and guarded in their opposition or courageous in their recourse to the courts, voicing their views in a few limited forums and publications⁴⁶ or in their protest marches

and strikes to call attention to their grievances, some of them ending in prison. Some religious and prominent citizens have been in the vanguard of open and peaceful opposition. Criticisms and challenges hurled against the Marcoses and the administration are rarely carried by the media, with the notable exception of the activities of the Communists and the Moslem rebels. It appears that vast numbers of the citizenry, particularly in the rural areas, do not feel affected by the constraints on political participation. To many of them, politics, except for elections and patronage, had been an esoteric activity carried out in the remote centers of power.

In sum, President Marcos, with the active participation of his wife who is also appointed governor of Metro Manila, is the undisputed head of a new encompassing power structure or grand coalition which consists of: (1) the military; (2) cabinet members and technocrats and the bureaucracy under them; (3) local officials who also hold office by presidential appointment; (4) persons close to the president or Mrs. Marcos, whether relatives or loyal friends, and former politicians; and (5) businessmen who enjoy the political stability and economic incentives which the administration provides. At the base of this political pyramid are the millions whose welfare is the avowed aim of the New Society, in whose name change and reforms

44. Jose V. Abueva, "Some Outstanding Characteristics of the New Constitution" (Quezon City: mimeographed, 1973), pp. 1-8.

45. Onofre D. Corpuz, *Liberty and Government in the New Society* (Manila: Department of Public Information, c. 1973), pp. 1-32.

46. See Salvador P. Lopez, *The Philippines under Martial Law* (Quezon City: University

of the Philippines Press, 1974); Civil Liberties Union, *The State of the Nation after Three Years of Martial Law* (Makati: Civil Liberties Union, 21 September 1975); Jovito R. Salonga et al., *A Message of Hope to Filipinos Who Care* (Manila: By a representative group of citizens, 1 October 1975); and Diosdado Macapagal, *Democracy in the Philippines* (Manila, 1976).

are being initiated, and whose support provides the regime with legitimacy through referenda and citizen assemblies, and the *sangguniang bayans* and *barangays*. Gone is the old pluralist power structure based on open competition and the two major political parties and the minor parties, including new political movements. Only one nationwide, non-party, political aggregation is allowed to exist. Various socio-economic groups throughout the country have been incorporated into the New Society⁴⁷ through the government's positive inducements and assistance, as well as the hint of their denial if these groups are uncooperative. The new system of local government, through various tiers of *sangguniang bayan*, including *samahang nayons* (pre-cooperatives) and *kilusang bayans* (cooperatives), and the *barangays*, integrate the citizenry into the New Society of President Marcos.

The New Society definitely has improved peace and order, except in the rebel areas of Luzon and Mindanao, substantially increased government revenues and expenditures, boosted food production and built infrastructure as never before, raised large foreign loans for development, attracted foreign investments, promoted and expanded exports, developed tourism, implemented land reform on rice and corn lands far beyond all previous efforts, and instilled a measure of citizen discipline and social order. Export markets have been diversified. Diplomatic and trade relations have been opened with China, Soviet Russia, and other Socialist states.

Philippine sovereignty is being asserted in the operation of U.S. military bases in the islands. Greater support has been given to research in science, agriculture, technology, and even the social sciences. Given its ends and norms, government in the New Society has introduced greater rationality and a long-range perspective in its planning and management. The question may be asked: which of these important accomplishments could have been achieved, and to what extent, only by a shift to authoritarian rule, rather than by a more determined and vigorous exercise of governmental powers under the pre-martial law political system?

Claims of markedly improved public service and less corruption are being contradicted by the experiences of citizens, as President Marcos himself has admitted.⁴⁸ The absence of a legislature and a free press denies the public reliable information regarding the inner workings of the government and the true sentiments of the people, as well as a check on the expenditure of public funds. Official admonitions against extravagance and ostentation seem hypocritical in the light of the perceived life-styles of the political leadership. The anxiety over impressing the world and attaining international approval for the administration has cost the people unreported millions in the extravagant hosting of conferences and public entertainment and in luxurious foreign visits. Tremendous amounts are invested in government information programs, including an expanded intelligence network. The emphasis on prestige and costly

47. Remigio E. Agpalo, *The Organic-Hierarchical Paradigm and Politics in the Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1973), pp. 25-8.

48. Ferdinand E. Marcos, "The President's Report to the Nation," 19 September 1975, pp. 16-19.

centers in Metro Manila raises the question of priorities in the allocation of scarce resources of an underdeveloped country, many of whose government services barely reach the people in the countryside. Population growth, inflation, the keen competition for employment, and falling real incomes tend to nullify some of the otherwise impressive gains in the New Society. Whether wealth and welfare are being redistributed remains to be proved. Civil liberties are in jeopardy.⁴⁹ Arbitrary arrests and detention, and even torture, are being reported by word of mouth and recently confirmed by a team report of Amnesty International. Academic freedom is constrained. The holding of referenda and the *sangguniang bayan* system appear to be haphazard and managed affairs lacking credibility. This is unfortunate because with proper care they could become honest, workable, and superior substitutes for the discarded institutions of local representation.

THE AUTHORITARIAN-DEMOCRATIC
POLITICAL CULTURE, "REVOLUTION
FROM THE CENTER," AND THE
AMERICAN HERITAGE

Martial law in the Philippines illustrates the latest, and most pronounced, tilting toward authoritarianism in the continuing mixture and interaction of democratic and authoritarian elements in Filipino society and polity. It will be recalled that the pre-Spanish *barangay* was essentially authoritarian, hierarchical, and non-egalitarian. Spanish colonialism aggravated the domination of the "superior" ruler

over "inferior" subjects. The Philippine Revolution and the first Philippine Republic, while espousing egalitarian and participatory ideals, were self-consciously oligarchical and elitist, although nationalist in spirit. Throughout the American tutelage in democracy, egalitarian, populist, libertarian, and capitalist ideas and institutions were superimposed upon the largely non-egalitarian, hierarchical, oligarchical, and elitist socio-economic structure and political culture. The colonial stance of American democratic tutelage was mitigated only by the early decision to grant independence to her ward upon meeting certain criteria of preparedness for self-rule. The Japanese occupation not only was a ruthless authoritarianism by an alien conqueror, but it also revived in some areas under guerrilla control the rule of armed might by Filipinos over their powerless countrymen.

Since independence was regained in 1946, the reinforcing combination of private enterprise, political freedom, gross inequalities in wealth and access to power, social change and new challenges to the established order, and links between Filipino capitalists and foreign business interests, all accelerated the centralization of governmental power and the concentration of wealth and the concomitant weakening of local governments, local leadership, and local organizations. Intense political competition and political activism also spawned some warlordism and violence which eventually evoked an authoritarian response.

Except in centers of greatest population, social change, and politicization, traditional values and behavior patterns have persisted.

49. Lopez, *The Philippines under Martial Law*, p. 12.

Many "little people" still expect to be subordinate to and be dominated by the "big people." Mass poverty continues to be justified, excused, and accepted in various ways, even as its reduction or elimination has been avowed by successive leaders and administrations. Now President Marcos speaks of "the conquest of mass poverty" as the aim of the New Society. Despite three generations of democratic politics, popular notions of leadership show admiration for the leader who is strong (*malakas*), decisive and swift (*mabilis*), and cunning or wise (*marunong*), even if the concrete manifestations of such strength (*palakasan*), decisiveness and expeditiousness (*pabilisan*), and cunning (*katalinuhan*) go beyond the bounds of a Westernized legal and democratic system, for the traditional Filipino worldview or philosophy is non-dualistic. It is based on the unity of unwritten custom and formal laws. While American-style democracy emphasizes individualism and equality, Filipino values stress communitarianism or belonging to the group (*sakop*) which, however, often is confined to the family or to the other face-to-face groups. Acceptance of inequality and hierarchy and conformism (*pakikisama*) are valued as a way of ensuring harmony and togetherness.

The democratic concept of leadership regards the leader mainly as instrumental to the achievement of shared goals and implies responsibility to the followers commensurate with their limited support. Authority resides in the leader's position and his faithful exercise thereof. In the Philippines, men, not laws, constitute the content of authority.

Applying this traditional concept of leadership, President Marcos, "the Big Man," is the head of the national alliance system. "His clients or followers look up to the Big Man and serve him personally. They attribute to him the accomplishments of the group as well as make him the scapegoat for failure. . . . Loyalty is not issue-oriented but personality-oriented because the Big Man embodies the group."⁵⁰ It can be argued that the foregoing concept of leadership leads to this conclusion which is disconcerting to the democrat, to say the least: "If the Filipino family and society is [sic] authoritarian, so must be its government if it is to be Filipino. The Big Man is the symbol of the national *sakop* and should concretize its aspirations."⁵¹

Among President Marcos's perceived political assets is his deep understanding, if not mastery, of mass psychology and popular values in relation to his leadership. In several speeches delivered under martial law, Marcos has used the organic and the familial analogy, which is traditional:

To the President, he is the head of the national polity, and the various government officials are his eyes and ears, his arms and fingers. He is also the father, and the rest of the people are his children. The nation, therefore, is one extended family, an organic whole in which everyone is . . . a relative, to everybody.⁵²

By his assumption of total governmental authority under martial

50. Leonardo N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacloban: Divine Word University, 1974), p. 99.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

52. Agpalo, *The Organic-Hierarchical Paradigm*, p. 24.

law, President Marcos has become, amid some liberal democratic elements in the Filipino political system, a reincarnation, with a vengeance, of the pre-Spanish *dato*, the contemporary *Pangulo* (head) par excellence in the traditional view, although many Filipino democrats naturally deplore the fact. The rise of technocracy is consonant with the elitist nature of the new political system as with the old.

The publicized commitment of the New Society to democratize or redistribute both power and wealth is both highly laudable and highly problematic. The means and their effectiveness are yet to be demonstrated, and it will take much time. Meanwhile, in addition to the positive changes noted above,

the most clear-cut political change is the increasingly pervasive strength of the Marcos regime. Political and economic initiative continues to come from the center. Not only is the Marcos regime concentrating and mobilizing wealth; it also is concentrating and mobilizing other instruments of political power, in particular the military, the mass media, and foreign resources. These instruments of political power contribute a technologically modernized form of elite domination. In this fashion, elite rule persists. Indeed, the ruling elite now possesses greater power than ever before.⁵³

If this concentrated and pervasive political and economic strength can be utilized to change the political and economic structure fundamentally, President Marcos and the national alliance under him will have proved their basic thesis that the "democratic revolution" can be mounted from the center or the top,

thus preempting for good, as he has intended, the bloody revolution from below. Otherwise, "so long as resources and power continue to be lodged in a few in this otherwise enlightened age, the potential for grassroots movements looms ever greater."⁵⁴

How stable is the new political system? Administration leaders claim that its stability is being ensured by steady building and consolidation of the structure of and support for the Marcos administration and the New Society, the control of the Communist and Moslem rebellions, and the restoration of peace and order. The institution of the *Sangguniang Pambansa* (national legislative advisory council) is cited as part of the transition to the parliamentary system envisaged in the 1973 constitution. Government effectiveness and "dynamic flexibility" also are cited as contributing to political stability, and so are international recognition and assistance in loans and investments. Others hold the view that institutionalization of the evolving political system will not progress much until the constitutional transition occurs. The fact that the succession to President Marcos is the subject of an unpublished presidential decree which is kept secret from the people is taken to be one clear sign of the inherent instability of the new political order. Still others believe that the military, having shared in governance, will not easily relinquish its unprecedented power. The view is even expressed that "The Filipinos

53. Rosenberg, "Conclusion: Premonitions of Martial Law," pp. 257-58.

54. Mary R. Hollnsteiner, "People Power: Community Participation in the Planning and Implementation of Human Settlements," in *Philippine Studies*, vol. 24 (1976), pp. 5-36.

are running a race with catastrophe. For it is far easier to lose freedom without bloodshed than to regain freedom without bloodshed.”⁵⁵

Whatever may be said of authoritarianism in the New Society, it should be pointed out that the continuing influences of the Amer-

ican democratic heritage and Spanish Catholicism are being felt in the dialectics of continuity and change. For, indeed, one has to be rabidly against the Marcos administration not to appreciate how it tries to temper the exercise of concentrated power with the moderating ideals of Christianity and liberal democracy, not to mention humane Filipino traditional values.

55. Lopez, *The Philippines under Martial Law*, p. 11.